

Great was the joy of the shepherds at Bethlehem and the wise men from the East when they saw the baby Jesus. The old man, Simeon, blessed God for the great Light which had come into the world. And now Christ Jesus gives all who behold Him with faith the fulness of joy and remains the true Light "Which lighteth every man, that cometh into the world" (John 1 :9).

The call to all men sounds above our planet with new force—"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5 :19). Christ needs men. He loves all mankind and He wishes that all nations should have peace and blessing. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men"—such were the angels' words of praise on Christmas day.

We invite all of you, dear brothers and sisters, to offer a special prayer of thanksgiving to God for the blessing of peace on earth during the past year of 1972, for the greater warmth in the international climate, for the efforts of the nations' leaders in the work of relaxing international tension.

We will pray that the coming year of 1973 will be a year when ideas of peace and brotherhood amongst nations triumph.

May the prophecy desired by all nations be fulfilled : "and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks : nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2 :4).

Dear Christians ! God's Word calls us to new efforts of peacemaking. During the days of Christmas may each of us be filled with new strength and hope in the Lord.

Let us follow Christ, spreading everywhere peace and love !

With brotherly Christian greetings,

THE ALL-UNION COUNCIL OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS AND BAPTISTS IN THE USSR.

25 December 1972 Moscow, Post Office Box 520, AUCECB¹⁰

5. *Statement by the Baptist Believers of Piryatin (complete text)*

Copies to : N. V. Podgorny, chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR

L. I. Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU

Rudenko, General Procurator of the USSR

¹⁰ This message was sent out from the Baptist headquarters in Moscow by post to those abroad who receive the journal, *Bratsky Vestnik* ("Fraternal Messenger").

Kozin, Procurator of Piryatin, Poltava region
Council of Churches of the ECB in the USSR
from the Evangelical Christian and Baptist believers of Piryatin, Poltava
region.

STATEMENT

On the basis of ordinary justice, in conformity with Article 124 of the Constitution of the USSR, the Decree on the Separation of the Church from the State and of Schools from the Church of 23 January, 1918, articles 18 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 February 1948, the Convention for preventing Crimes of Genocide, the Convention against discrimination in the field of Education (*Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR*, No. 44/1131 art. 452-1962) and many juridical interpretations on freedom of conscience in the USSR, such as: the interpretation of NKYu¹¹ for 10 July, 1920, No. 712, that of department 5 of the NKYu for 25 August 1922, No. 512, Instructions of the NKYu and NKVD¹² points 7, 8, for 1920, No. 157, Circular No. 6 of the TsIK¹³ and NKVD (Ukrainian SSR) of January 1924; also many explanatory articles in brochures, journals and newspapers about the above mentioned fundamental laws on freedom of conscience in the USSR, *which are still in force*, we, the ECB believers of Piryatin, at present have the right to *de facto* freedom of conscience, freedom of confession and do not break the law, because there is nothing harmful, nothing opposed to the government nothing fanatical in our activity, but only that which is spiritually useful and healthy, just, honest, peaceful in accordance with the teaching of Jesus Christ. We understand the laws on freedom of conscience as they are recorded and interpreted by the legislative organs themselves of the USSR and by V. I. Lenin during the construction of the Soviet State, and to interpret them in any other way is to distort them (*Works of Lenin*, 1st edition, 1924, Vol. I, pp. 508-509 and Vol. VIII, art. 316-392).

Therefore to accuse us of breaking the law, to punish us, forcibly to apply administrative measures on us, to restrict and limit freedom of confession, to threaten us and offend the feelings of believers—all this represents a *crime against the law*.

Our community is registered and has a permanent prayer house, but despite all this the local authorities of Piryatin behave towards us in an unjust and illegal manner¹⁴.

Here are the facts about the violations of the laws on the separation of

¹¹ Narodny Kommissariat Yustitsii (People's Commissariat of Justice).

¹² Narodny Kommissariat Vnutrennykh Del (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs).

¹³ Tsentralny Ispolnitelnyi Komitet (Central Executive Committee).

¹⁴ It is unusual for a registered church to be treated in this way. See *Bratsky Vestnik*, Sept.-Oct. 1972, p. 70, the official Baptist journal, for an interesting reference.

the Church from the State and of schools from the Church perpetrated by the local authorities.

1. When visiting our services, representatives of the authorities disturb them by noting down those believers who are present and photographing them against their will. They were ordered to stop photographing, but they continued to do so. Members of the KGB, an investigator, representatives of the *soviet*'s executive committee and of the town *soviet* took part.

2. They interfere in the funerals of believers and disturb their peaceful course by photographing those who preach, by detaining them, thereby making the people indignant and offending the feelings of the relatives and close friends of the deceased. Members of the militia, KGB and representatives of the local authorities have taken part in this.

3. On 6 June 1972 searches took place in nine flats of believers; religious literature (which is not political, harmful or banned) was confiscated.

4. Many different citizens have been summoned to the procuracy for questioning and have been asked to give evidence about individual believers, about internal church matters; pressure was used, some believers were threatened with the loss of their pensions, with fines, with a court trial, their feelings were offended, and their signature was demanded. Even minors have been summoned to the procuracy for questioning on internal church matters and their signatures have been demanded. With this end in view they summon citizens who have been previously excluded from the church, people from another district who are certainly not members of the church, who have once or twice attended a service, such as the neighbours—nonbelievers—of our brother V. V. Kapeti. His neighbours, a mother and her ten year-old son, were summoned, questioned and forced to sign a statement. A woman who had been expelled from the church was asked to sign a previously prepared statement. They asked for a report on this brother from his place of work. The town *soviet* collected facts on his family situation. This gives us grounds for thinking that an investigation and court case are being organized.

5. Previously members of our community have been fined. On the basis of the above, we ask you to instruct the local authorities (1) to stop this unjust administrative struggle against the Church, this interference in her internal affairs and these threats of a trial; (2) to stop the investigation; (3) to return all the religious literature confiscated during the search to M. D. Domashenko, N. Ya. Maslenko, V. F. Kapeti, V. V. Kapeti, and I. I. Pavlenko, in conformity with the copies of the search warrant and confiscation order which they possess. The literature comprises a Bible, Gospel (New Testament) of Jesus Christ our Lord, collections of hymns,

songbooks with music, manuscripts, journals, brochures—all with a religious content.

9 July 1972

Today—Monday—10 July, 1972 at 2 p.m., Vasya Kapeti was arrested.
36 signatures, [including : 1. K. I. Shchegelska 2. M. Maslenko 3. L. Domashenko 4. Ye. Bapugak 5. Ch. Keda]

Note: This translation was made from an original carbon copy. The section between the signs (. . . .) is added by a single hand. The CSRC possesses many "first copies" of such documents, containing the actual signatures.

6. Secret Instructions on the Supervision of Parish Life

The following document contains instructions, addressed to local government authorities, about the study and supervision of religious life. Despite the 1918 Decree, which separated the Church from the State, in practice, as this document shows, government organs are not averse to interfering in the organizational life of religious groups.

*Basic Questions on the Activity of Commissions¹⁵
For Assisting District Soviets and their Executive Committees,
In Supervising the Observance of Legislation on Cults
(Vestnik RSKhD, Paris—New York, No. 83, 1967, pp. 3-6)*

1. The Social Commissions for assisting in supervising the observance of legislation on cults are set up alongside the executive committees of city and district soviets.

2. The Commissions are guided in their work by the laws, resolutions, instructions on religious cults issued by the highest legislative and executive organs of the Soviet State, and also by the interpretations issued by the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church¹⁶, attached to the Council of Ministers of the USSR, on questions related to the application of legislation on cults.

3. People should be selected as members of the Commissions who are politically educated and who, with knowledge of the subject, are able to supervise and observe the fulfilling of Soviet legislation on religious cults by religious societies.

Deputies of the local soviets should be drawn in as members of the Commissions, as well as workers in cultural and educational institutions, in financial bodies, organs of popular education, propagandists, pensioners, workers in village soviets and other people from amongst the local activist groups.

¹⁵ These commissions were set up after the plenum of the Party's ideological commission in November 1963. See *Partiinaya Zhizn'*, No. 2, 1964, pp. 22-26.

¹⁶ This Council was amalgamated in 1966 with the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults to form the now functioning Council for Religious Affairs.